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NOTES ON A MERIDA PARISH*

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In pursuing a more intimate understanding of Catholic culture, the author had suggested the existence of a continuum of Catholicism which runs from formal, thru nominal and cultural, to folk Catholicism. The original statement regarding this continuum appeared in a brief article "Aspects of Religious Life in Tepoztlán,"¹ which was based on data gathered at that village where the previous studies of Redfield and Lewis had already provided a foundation of facts.² In our work there one part of the task had been to see to what extent the formal and folk aspects of Catholicism appear to be in harmony. Redfield, who read our Tepoztlán material, was inclined to accept tentatively the concept of the continuum, but suggested further clarification of the ideas involved. Lang suggested, in addition, that a statement of the "indicators" for each segment on the continuum should be made which would both highlight the differences and at the same time facilitate comparative studies.

We have tentatively, therefore, worked out the preliminary "indicators" as follows:

Formal Catholicism (1) Full and complete knowledge of the Catholic faith, its expectations, and proscriptions. (2) A reasonably thorough desire to practice this faith, and evidence that such a wish is being fulfilled. (3) A realization on the part of one's neighbors that one is "muy Catolica."

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¹Spitzer, Allen, "Aspects of Religious Life in Tepoztlán," in *Anthropological Quarterly*, 30:1-17, 1957.

²Redfield, Robert, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, Chicago, 1941; Lewis, Oscar, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*, Urbana, 1951.

Nominal Catholicism (1) Identification with and allegiance to the Catholic Church. (2) Perfunctory relationship with the formal Church. (3) Independent interpretation of a variety of Catholic injunctions and practices.

Cultural Catholicism (1) The Church regarded as an adjunct of the total social organization and subordinate to it. (2) Identification with Catholicism but the Church treated on a natural par with any other compartment of daily life. (3) The presence of the Church regarded as an expression of the cultural organization of the environment rather than as a path to spirituality.

Folk Catholicism (1) Most of the religious practices indigenous to the people, although in some instances they may be in harmony with the formal Church. (2) These practices often expressed in terms not acceptable to the formal Church in its official interpretation of the faith. (3) These practices may contain many "pagan" or "foreign" elements which have been fused with Catholicism, the latter being merely a veneer or at best a contributor to a mixture of elements.

In view of the fact that field work had already been done in the summers of 1951 and 1952 by the investigator and his wife in Yucatan, especially at Mérida, it was decided to return to that area to seek clarification of the continuum concept. It was hoped that in Mérida the nominal and cultural elements could be observed more clearly than at Tepoztlán, while both the formal and folk aspects of the continuum would be operative. In presenting the material we shall first give a description, based on data gathered from a number of informants and on personal observation, of the particular parish of Mérida selected for study; we shall then give a close-up of four families, each representative of one of the segments on the continuum; and finally, we shall make some comparisons.

THE PARISH OF SAN SEBASTIAN

The city of Mérida is made up of *barrios*, as discussed by Hansen as well as by Redfield.³ Originally the church of San Sebastián had been erected to serve that *barrio*. Today, however, the present parish limits do not coincide exactly with those

³Hansen, Asael T., "The Ecology of a Latin-American City," in Reuter, ed., *Race and Culture Contacts*, N. Y., 1934, pp. 124-42.

of the *barrio*, the boundaries having been extended after the War of the Castes when the people began building outside the city walls. The area is fan-shaped, joining the Cathedral parish at the smaller end and extending a great distance into the country on the road to Campeche. It lies in the southwest portion of Mérida, bounded on the north by Calle 71, extending east from Calle 64 to 87, west to the railroad going to Campeche, and south on Calle 66, leading out of the city and extending to the town of Muna, about thirty miles into the hinterland, between the highway and the railroad tracks. The slums of Mérida are included; these lie just outside and behind the cemeteries. People live in the slums in very poor shelters or hovels, as will be described later in another connection. Some of these homes are made of cardboard, or whatever can be pieced together, practically camp-style. At present there is not an accurate count, but it is estimated that about 15,000 people live in the total area.

Although this parish presents some distinctive problems, in many ways it shares problems which are similar to those found in the other parishes of Mérida. San Sebastián, however, does have a color all of its own. Briefly, it is supposed to be the poorest parish in the city; its people are supposed to be the toughest as well as the most artistic; it contains the *rastro* (slaughter house), the *Zona Intolerancia* (red light district: one for the rich and one for the poor), and the cemeteries; the incredible slum conditions, and other characteristics, are considered to be somewhat unique. Furthermore, it is the only parish church in Mérida which is served by priests from an American missionary society. Considering these and other data previously collected on Mérida, it appeared that this parish would be the most helpful and revealing for our study.

First we shall offer a brief description of the life of the parish as it was characterized by some of our informants at the religious center of the *barrio*—the Church. A few well instructed people are known to practice Catholicism in the full sense. These include a school teacher or two and a few others who fully understand the Catholic faith and practice it. It was estimated that there are about 200 individuals in the area who may be classed as formal Catholics.

At the time of our visit, a *fiesta* was in progress, celebrating the Feast of the Assumption. This *fiesta* was fostered and supported

by the various *gremios*, or religious guilds which are laymen's organizations wielding considerable influence among the populace. During this time, large numbers of people attended church, and it was said that most of them might be designated as cultural Catholics who consider the religious world as one compartment of culture, on a level with the rest, thus departing from the formal position of the Church. It was also pointed out that large numbers of people in this parish recite prayers to the gods of the four winds (as Redfield had noted in Yucatecan life in the villages),⁴ and that they continue to have a pagan dance—*cabeza de cochín* (the dance of the pig's head), the origin of which is obscure. It seems that what is pronounced in village life, and what may be designated as folk Catholicism, also exists to a considerable extent in this *barrio* and parish. Father Winrich attempted to apply our concept of the continuum to San Sebastián parish and felt that it is borne out by the facts in his experience.

As for church attendance in general, there are a few daily communicants and a slightly larger number who come regularly to Mass. For the many, however, it would seem that the reception of the Sacraments is largely confined to the occasions of Baptism, Confirmation (according to tradition infants are confirmed in Yucatán as elsewhere in Mexico), First Communion, Marriage and Extreme Unction.

In regard to some other problems, however, the parish of San Sebastián is atypical insofar as the Maryknoll Fathers are in charge and they can draw upon outside funds to aid their parishioners. In less favored parishes it is the people who must come to the aid of the priest who, after ordination, is commonly expected and obliged to support not only his parents but also his brothers and sisters. Incidentally some of the adverse reports regarding the personal lives of native members of the clergy in the area may reflect misunderstandings of this familial situation. Furthermore in the other *barrios* there is a difference of from two to three hundred pesos in the amount which the priest expects as an offering at the time of a marriage, for example. The Maryknoll Fathers are working in their own parish of San

⁴Redfield, Robert, and Villa Rojas, Alfonso, *Chan Kom: A Maya Village*, Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication No. 448, 1934; and *A Village that Chose Progress: Chan Kom Revisited*, Chicago, 1950.

Sebastián toward setting up standards for parish activities which will ultimately be helpful to priests in the other parishes of the city.

San Sebastián Church maintains about eight organizations, some of which are of recent origin, and others of which have a long history and tradition. Among the former is a credit union initiated for the purpose of helping solve some of the economic problems of the people. Leadership is in the hands of the clergy, whereas leadership in the *gremios* is in the hands of the parishioners. Incidentally, the leaders of some of the *gremios* are also Masons, yet it never occurs to them that there is any inconsistency in their position.

Another of the newer organizations is Acción Católica (Catholic Action) the purpose of which is to provide opportunities for spiritual and social development among the youth. Boys and young men do not respond to this approach, however, and are extremely reluctant to attend dances or other social activities planned by the girls who are active in the group. There appears to be an attitude of suspicion on the part of the populace toward those who are devoted to the formal Church, although the distinction does not seem to be made consciously.

For more than a year, a clinic was maintained by the parish, but had to be discontinued when the pastor refused to perform the marriage ceremony for the daughter of a friend of the owner of the building used to house the clinic. The girl was to marry a Protestant who refused to sign the usual promises required when a mixed marriage occurs. Currently, however, plans are in progress to obtain housing nearer the church for the clinic and to expand the medical services offered. It might be mentioned in passing that two chapels of Protestant denominations have been established within the *barrio*.

Maryknoll has initiated an organization, by means of which surplus food from the United States is made available through Catholic Relief Service for distribution to the needy in the parishes in Mérida and throughout the Yucatecan Peninsula. There has been considerable confusion regarding this activity, and some reluctance to utilize the food which cannot be sold but must be made available to needy parishioners free of charge. Yucatecan pastors, to whom this latter concept is quite foreign, were quick to see that free food meant a little extra cash for men

in the households; if they did not give this money to their wives for food, they could purchase alcohol for themselves. Some attempts were made to offset this tendency by the priests suggesting that certain needs of the church might be met with money saved when food is distributed, but these attempts were sporadic, and have been discontinued. San Sebastián parish has taken the lead in attempting to clarify the problems, and in demonstrating ways in which the food might be distributed so as to obtain the desired results.

There are at least three *haciendas* within the confines of this parish, which operate as in the old days. One of these has a large processing mill for henequin, a family mansion, a local store, and a church built by the family. Several visits were made to this *hacienda* and its church, as well as to the various other properties and activities there were observed. It was learned that, with the exception of one son, the family who owns the *hacienda* spends most of the time in cities away from it. This is a remnant of a way of life which has not entirely disappeared from the Yucatecan scene.

The laborers on the *hacienda* live with their families in what appear to be fairly adequate individual homes. The men work from Tuesday through Friday. On Saturday morning they are paid their wages; they take their money and go into Mérida to "celebrate." This usually takes the form of drinking, which continues through Saturday night and Sunday. They are allowed to take Monday to recuperate before beginning with the next week's labors. These workmen are paid according to the number of leaves of henequin (sisal) they cut per day. Most of their material needs are provided for, but there is little incentive for the development of initiative.

A tour of the parish was made several times, usually with the pastor. Some of the neighborhoods within the city seemed almost as remote as country villages. Everywhere we went the people were warm and friendly. In the poorer districts particularly the people responded to the pastor's greeting and the children were quite natural and outgoing.

TYPICAL FAMILIES

It was thought that in addition to observation and to interviewing selected informants, as well as to visiting a number of

homes and families, it would be desirable to obtain details regarding four families each one of which would be typical of a particular segment on the continuum. These details should yield information regarding the shadings of one element into another and at the same time illustrate the patterns characteristic of the continuum.

With cooperation in obtaining whatever data were already available careful arrangements were made for visits to the four selected families. The pastor accompanied the author and his wife, who were introduced as "visiting Americans who wanted very much to see a typical Yucatecan home." What is presented here is neither a case history nor a complete account of each family but rather a brief description hitting the highlights of those aspects of family life that bear upon the generalized statements previously made regarding the structure of the parish in terms of the continuum.

Formal Catholicism. Aquilo and Josefa A. live on a humble, rural-like street, not too far from the Church, in a modest stone structure. They are each 44 years old. Seven of their eight children are living. The family name is Mayan but they are a mestizo family, which is common in this parish. Aquilo is a carpenter. His family had a history of drinking and until three years ago, he too had been a heavy drinker. Theirs had been a civil marriage, but three years ago they entered into a Church marriage. The entire family attends daily Mass and usually receives Communion. By their neighbors they are considered social outcasts precisely because of this kind and degree of religiosity. If, for instance, some neighborhood family were to give a *fiesta*, the A.'s would not be invited. None of their eligible daughters is able to find a suitor because these girls participate in Acción Católica. Señor A. belongs to the Church's credit union. His children, excepting one boy who has a scholarship in a Catholic high school, attend public schools as these are free.

The A. home, which consists of three large rooms, is very simple, although definitely several degrees better than housing in the slums. The living room is comfortably furnished with several large chairs, a piano, tables and a sewing machine. On the walls are the large hooks for hammocks which are used for sleeping. Behind this room is the kitchen which is adequately equipped and where flies are abundant as there are no screens. The workroom

is filled with materials for the making of simple wooden frames used in the bee industry. The younger children earn a small pittance from the supplier of these materials by putting the frames together. The family is poor but can manage. As Señora A. put it, "There are some better off than we, but there are also many who are worse off."

The members of the family meet all of their religious obligations. They are practicing Catholics, but they pay a price for this closeness to the formal Church. According to American standards, the older girls are neat and presentable, but because they work for the Church in Catholic Action, they are not socially acceptable. This is a unique family, and one which feels a particular kind of loneliness, as do those other individuals in the parish who might be described as formal Catholics.

The facts about the A.'s show that by solemnizing their marriage in the Church, by their attendance at daily Mass, by their participation in Catholic Action and other Church organizations, and by their devotion to the proscriptions of the Church, they find themselves in a small minority. They are viewed with some degree of resentment by neighbors and other parishioners who have different notions about what it means to be a good Catholic.

Nominal Catholicism. A visit was made to the home of Filipe and María G. within the confines of the *barrio*. This home is clean, attractive, well-furnished and comfortable. Filipe works in the *rastro* and is thereby a relatively good bread-winner. Despite this, Señora G. makes some sort of flavored ices which she sells at a small price by the bucketfull to her neighbors. Señora G., as lady of the house, is outgoing, very sociable, and insistant that her visitors accept refreshments while enjoying the attractive living room. In this home beds are used for sleeping instead of hammocks; the equipment includes a good-sized refrigerator and many modern conveniences. The G.'s have been married 42 years and have had ten children, three of whom have died. Their children attend Mass and Catechism classes. The parents do go to Church on Sundays, but seldom to the Sacraments. Occasionally the mother will go to Communion on a First Friday of the month. Their home is cluttered with shrines in the living room and in all the bedrooms. Each member of the family has an individual shrine. Particularly important among

the images displayed are the *Niña de Atorche* and the *Trés Reyes*. Filipe, it was proudly pointed out, went to Confession and received Communion on both his twenty-fifth and his fortieth wedding anniversaries. María regularly makes her Easter Duty; Filipe has seldom been known to do this.

Economically, this family is considered to belong to the new middle class in Mérida. They deny any Maya background although they, too, are in the mestizo group. They are at ease in the outside world, comfortable at home, and have a sufficiency of met needs. Their quite attractive unmarried daughters have boy-friends.

It is commonly assumed that a large number of husbands in this middle class find it expedient to have a mistress relationship. Such men would ordinarily not go to Confession as they would not consider surrendering their alliances for the benefit of receiving the Sacraments. It is not unlikely that some, at least, would wish to receive the Sacraments, but must refrain because of their preference for following a custom which is socially acceptable. They therefore show considerable respect for the Church's position in such matters; yet they feel that the Church is nonetheless interfering with a way of life which is natural for them. This seems significant as a cultural phenomenon.

The fact is, the G. family is representative of something very special in San Sebastián. Such families are considered to be *THE* Catholics of the community. What we designate as a nominal Catholic is thus the accepted Catholic. His relationship to his church is the expected way, the comfortable way, and hence, the socially approved way. It is sometimes estimated that possibly as high as 80% of the men may reject the Church's teachings on matters concerning marital fidelity. The estimate might be high, but the pattern is a common expression of a presumed social need. This gap between the teaching of the Church and the mores of the parish segment alluded to here, is also reflected in the attitudes of many of the women.

It is noted that there are some differences between the religious practices of María and Filipe. But to both the household shrines are important and these, with their constantly burning vigil lights, express some of the feelings of the family members regarding at least the *santos* cult. The allegiance of such families to the formal Church is emphasized by the fact that almost without

exception a seriously ill person sends for the *padre* to come so that the blessing of the Church may be received before death.

Cultural Catholicism. In working out the shadings on this continuum our greatest difficulty lies in separating the cultural from the nominal Catholics. Nevertheless the family of Miguel and Minelia L. was selected as representative of cultural Catholicism. Miguel is 53 years old; his attractive wife Minelia is but 30, and they have four young children. Miguel is described in his region as a *Comerciante*, which can mean just about anything in the line of obtaining funds for his needs. The suggestion is that this places him in a slightly higher bracket, than is usual for the ordinary laborer or peasant farmer. He is more a man of the town, an urbanite. Miguel has had six years of formal schooling, whereas Minelia completed the *secundaria*. Miguel was at one time in political life, a *compañero* of ex-President General Cardenas, who, at the time of this interview, was visiting Mérida and consulting and consorting with a number of his former comrades.

Minelia was obviously annoyed by, but coolly polite during, our visit. She carefully replied to questions, volunteered not too much, and showed little of the cordiality which was found on the part of others in the previous interviews. Despite the fact that she lives across the street from the church, she finds it very difficult to attend Mass because of caring for her children. However, she sends the children to Mass and Catechism class. Miguel considers that churches are a good influence, and in this his wife concurs. They feel that the Church is all right if She just doesn't interfere with the government. Education, they believe, belongs in the hands of the government. Minelia stated that she and Miguel were married in a Mexico City church, but could not recall the name nor the part of the city in which it is located. Miguel is known as a "big feast Catholic," and does maintain that type of relation to the Church, coming for special *fiestas*. It is unlikely that he would make his Easter duty. Should it be agreed that this family exemplifies the pattern of cultural Catholicism, it is probable that many of the people in this parish would fall into the same group.

We shall insert here material illustrative of this category although it was gathered from an informant who lives outside

of the parish of San Sebastián. This informant, Señor B., says that he is not a Catholic himself, in spite of the fact that he was born into a Catholic family, and yet he was careful to point out that his wife and family are Catholics. He clearly sees a value in the Church although he denies a personal relationship with Catholicism. In his opinion the Church is something which his country needs, for if Catholicism were to disappear, then Communism would come in and take over. He indicated that the Church helps in many human situations where there are problems, chiefly those involving sex and the need for protection and assistance for women. Because of the Church's teachings about the Virgin Birth, the position of woman is raised to greater dignity, and therefore the Virgin is a figure to whom women can turn. He feels that the father's position is left out, making it difficult for a man to have much of a place in the scheme of things. However, he spoke highly of the Archbishop of Yucatán, stating that he is a man of culture and honesty who is respected by everyone because of the good he does for the people. Señor B. believes that there are many good priests who love the people and work hard for them, but that there are others who are looking more for money and personal prestige. He concedes that this is a human problem, which is found in every profession.⁵ In his preference for Catholicism over Communism, it seems that Señor B. is using the Church as an adjunct of the culture in which he participates; he feels that it is good for his womenfolk to be members of this Church, but for practical rather than for religious or spiritual reasons.

On the basis of information obtained about the cultural Catholic as contrasted with the nominal Catholic, it would appear that the latter leans toward the formal Church, while the former tends away from her. The differences between the two types seem to come out quite clearly in the interview given above where the cultural aspect is emphasized,—the Church being considered a good influence in society, but mainly important for women and children.

Folk Catholicism. This classification, sometimes referred to as "popular" Catholicism, is of particular interest since it was found

⁵ This point has been ably considered by Stephens, John L., *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols., New York, edition of 1948.

that the folk practices followed in San Sebastián parish are very similar to those followed in the rural villages. Even though many of the practices have no doctrinal or dogmatic basis in the Church, they are included in the continuum labelled "Catholicism," as Redfield, speaking from the anthropological rather than from the theological point of view, has mentioned to the present author. On the one hand, for instance, in the chapel of San Isidro at Chichén Itzá, the women gather to recite the rosary under one of their number, which is an indication of leadership having been retained on the part of the folk of that region, but is entirely in conformity with the formal Church. On the other hand, in the dramatic instance of the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico City, a cult arose out of the wishes of the Indian, and although approved by the formal Church, there is no obligation to believe or not to believe in a miraculous origin for the painting. There are, finally, practices and attitudes among the folk which in no way coincide with the intent of the formal Church.

The home selected as representative of folk Catholicism in the parish is that of Bartolomo and Carmen R. It is located opposite the *rastro* and it is quite rude and very simple. Bartolomo is perhaps exceptional among folk Catholics in that he is a soldier and serves in some small administrative unit in Mérida. At a table under the lean-to in her backyard, Carmen sells and serves refreshments, both light and potent. Thus her neighbors need not drink alone at home, nor go into the centre of town to an expensive bar, but can casually enjoy chatting with a companion at Carmen's table. Most of the people who live around her are laborers and work quite hard.

This family has had three children, of whom two sons, ages 11 and 16, are still living. An ancient *tía* (aunt) lives with them and is a part of the present family. In the living room an altar had been set up for a novena which had begun a few days previous to this visit. On this altar, among the profusion of vigil lights, there are no less than eight copies of the image of the *Niña de Atorche*,—a representation of the Christ Child dressed as a Spanish boy and a figure popular among the Indians. Six of these pictures were placed there by visiting families, in the hope of sharing in the benefits of the novena. To these families,

the presence of the picture assures this result, since they place the efficacy of the graces to be received in the painting itself rather than in what it might represent symbolically. In addition to the altar with its portraits of the *Niña*, there are also statues or pictures of the Virgin under various representations including Fátima, del Carmen, San Sebastián, the Assumption, and others. There are a number of incense-burners in which copal is used. The altar and its religious objects were clearly the center of interest to the family.

Carmen had hoped to have "the dance of the pig's head" for the last night of the novena, but found she could not raise sufficient funds for this enterprise, nor had there been time to make the necessary preparations to put on this dance in the proper manner. Father Winrich indicated that this was the first occasion upon which he had been able to get a parishioner to discuss "the dance of the pig's head" so freely, and was surprised that Carmen spoke of it without hesitation. He had not met Carmen before and believed that she and her husband are rare visitors to his church. It was obvious to the observer that Carmen felt that it was an honor to have the *padre* call upon her. The observers were treated cordially, and the family revealed some appreciation for the concern shown regarding their altar and other expressions of their religious interests.

On the basis of his contact with many such families, Father Winrich mentioned to us after the visit, that folk Catholicism gives a strong impression of being formal Catholicism although it is completely opposite to it in many ways. There is a special devotion,—which in some instances amounts to worship,—to the *Niña de Atorche*, to the *Santa Cruz*, and to the *Trés Reyes de Tizimín*. At times this is genuinely a folk experience, having nothing to do with an understanding of the Church's position in this regard. Many folk Catholics are extremely superstitious and indulge in religious practices the origin and content of which are probably not Christian.

Significantly, they come to church in great numbers on Good Friday, on which day, from the liturgical standpoint, Christ is no longer living. Their devotion is to the dead Christ. Their lives are non-sacramental and they do not seem to comprehend the idea of the living Christ. For example, they request Baptism

for their infants, not immediately, but anytime within the first two years, frequently depending upon their having enough money for a "Baptism *fiesta*."

Confirmation is customarily given to babies in this area. Because of the extremely high rate of infant mortality, a large percentage does not receive this Sacrament. Some adults baptized as infants, receive on their death beds not only Extreme Unction but also their First Communion and the Sacrament of Marriage. It is apparently exceptional for an individual to receive First Communion in childhood and for a marriage to be celebrated in the Church. It should be mentioned that in the parish of San Sebastián no stipend is anticipated from those who are unable to make an offering at the time when they receive such Sacraments.

There is considerable confusion regarding the existence, meaning, and interpretation of the Virgin Mary, and a similar type of confusion about the Crucifix. The *Cruz de la Popox* is treated as an idol and appears to have no connection in their minds with the concept of a living Christ. They expect punishment should they fail to dutifully serve the particular Cross of their devotions. Similar feeling is also expressed toward other religious objects. For example, evidence of it may be seen in the Mérida Cathedral where there is devotion to a black statue known as the Divine Redeemer. It is believed that merely to touch the foot of this statue is all that is necessary for the devotion to be efficacious.

Many of the people in this group fail, so far as we can see, to reach or comprehend the Christian concept of God. They are almost entirely without education in or understanding of the Faith. There is a real problem regarding the role of the parish priest in relation to folk Catholicism.

THE COMPARATIVE DATA

There are tentative generalizations which might be stated with regard to the kind of materials found in San Sebastián. A summary presentation of certain elements found in the continuum might serve to clarify the situation in this parish.

	FORMAL	NOMINAL	CULTURAL	FOLK
Characteristic Problem	Social rejection	Extra-marital relationships	Subordination of religious life to political interest	Excessive drinking
Family attitudes toward Church	All members practice Faith	Husband and wife might attend Mass, but greater effort on part of women	Women might attend Church; children given some instruction	No regular attendance
Socio-Economic Status	All classes, but predominately less privileged	The new middle class	Usually the comfortable and prosperous	The poorest

While the above might aid in the analysis of the kinds of people living in San Sebastián, it is recognized that the continuum we have defined is but an ideal construct and that some difficulty may be encountered in placing a given family at a precise position on the continuum. One example of such a difficulty is offered here by way of illustration.

Along the footpaths behind the cemetery is the one-room hovel of Señora Catalina F., whose husband had abandoned her for a second time in order to live with another woman. Catalina has had ten children, two of whom had died a few years ago and a third child—little eighteen-month old María Soccora—was now dying. Catalina was at the time of our visit suckling a new-born babe.

Her home was known to the pastor because she had sent word that since her María was dying, she wished to have the child confirmed. The investigators were invited to visit this particular family in order to be sponsors for the dying María. On the following morning, word having come to the pastor that María had died, a second visit was made to the home. Catalina had requested that the *padre* recite the prayers for the burial of an infant. She had no source of income save that from the begging on the streets by her older children. The day before, they had brought home only about a peso and a half. A month previously, little María had been placed in the Childrens' Hospital. Her condition had failed to improve and, out of an almost superstitious fear, Catalina had brought the child home because her other two children had passed away at the hospital when her husband abandoned her the first time. Now that this had hap-

pened again, she felt it was inevitable that María would die. It proved to be impossible to have a physician visit the home.

When the padre arrived for the last rites, the child was dressed in her best finery, flowers were arranged about her, and candles were burning. Catalina was young in appearance, very well-mannered and orderly. Among her few possessions in the crowded hut which housed eight people, was a tiny chest-like trunk containing her few prized belongings such as María's confirmation dress and her baptism certificate. Outwardly, it seemed as though she was well aware of the formal aspects of Catholicism. She stated with feeling that she had been married in the Cathedral. However, there appeared to be little likelihood of a consistent practice of the Faith, as a formal Catholic, and it is doubtful in just what position on the continuum she falls.

During our study we had considered it important to understand as far as possible how the Church conceives of and meets her problems relating to the varying degrees of Catholicism as evident in the parish of San Sebastián. The difficulties for formal Catholics as more or less social outcasts are recognized and the Church is attempting to deal with these problems by: 1. The organization of credit unions and cooperative stores; and 2. Religious organizations, primarily the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for instruction, and the Legion of Mary for social action, utilizing the cell method of infiltration into the life of the community.

The indirect method is used to approach the nominal Catholics, many of whom are semi-professional workers and business men. This method includes: 1. The scheduling of one Mass in the evening at a time convenient for daily attendance; 2. The creation of opportunities for the formation of new groups within the Church; and 3. The presentation twice a year of missions given by the Guadalupanos Sisters, with special conferences for girls, for married women, for men and boys, with the objective of bringing at least one family a year into the formal Church.

To cope with those problems which are presented by the cultural Catholic, special attention has been given to the teaching profession by means of the formation of social clubs for dancing and other types of recreation.

In dealing with folk Catholicism, two catechists of the Legion

of Mary have been employed; twelve centers of instruction are maintained in various parts of the parish by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Some of the material needs of the people are met indirectly through the parish participation in the International Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Thus it is seen that this parish had attempted a program to meet the particular problems and differences which are characteristic of the segments on the continuum.

The vastness of the parish responsibility may be seen in some of the contrasts observed. In the Hacienda Xucul, for example, less than ten miles from Mérida, more folk Catholicism has been found than exists in some of the more remote areas of the peninsula. In this connection, the pastor of San Sebastián cited his experience in the country bush village of Tzucacab with a population of about four thousand. He was asked to rate the proportion of the population falling into each type on the continuum in Tzucacab and in the parish of San Sebastián. His relative weighting of the number of people to be found in each category follows:

San Sebastián

1. Nominal
2. Folk
3. Cultural
4. Formal

Tzucacab

1. Folk
2. Nominal
3. Formal
4. Cultural

These no doubt are crude estimates, based upon the opinion of one informant, but they are stated here with the view of suggesting further inquiry into the possibilities of a detailed comparative study. There might be value in making comparisons with other Mérida parishes, with other regions of Mexico, and in terms of the folk-urban continuum as designed by Robert Redfield.

CONCLUSION

A more exact understanding of Catholic culture may be obtained by the analysis of a given Catholic society in terms of a continuum indicating some of the variations in the attitudes of the people toward Catholicism and the patterns arising from these differences. Such a scheme is conceived as gradations ranging from two polarities with the official position of the

Church at one extreme and indigenous religious practices at the other, intervals between being designated as nominal and cultural Catholicism. The investigator was not so much concerned with the Church's canonical definition as to who is a Catholic, but rather with how people reflect that religious complex identified as Catholicism. A way was sought to differentiate the manner in which Catholicism expresses itself, rather than attempting to measure the piety of groups or individuals. The indicators attempt to describe the pattern of each category on the continuum. Although the materials are based upon concrete situations in areas ordinarily described as Catholic, there is no reason to suppose that these indicators would not also serve to analyze the Catholic element in any group.

From the viewpoint of anthropology, the categories which make up the continuum reflect inclusion in the Catholic complex, regardless of the presence or absence of conformity with the wishes of the formal Church. Studies may then be made in depth, regarding a specific category, or movement from one to another when such movement is observable. The continuum is verifiable in field situations, but the indicators for each category are subject to greater refinement as the existing literature is further analyzed and as additional field studies are made.

ORIENTAL VERSIONS OF POLYPHEM'S MYTH

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A major problem in the study of cultural diffusion consists in determining how direct the contact between two cultures has been, and more particularly whether the written word has helped in the process. An interesting case is provided by the existence in the East of Homeric tales, especially that of Polyphem, in both folklore and literature, while at the same time nothing in the eastern world approaches the widespread and precise knowledge and the prestige won by Homer's epos in the western world.

The key question is that of whether Homer's work was translated into Arabic in classical times, or at least read in a form close to the original by Islamic scholars. Lane had come to an affirmative conclusion from the evidence that Masudi has recorded Homer's name (but nothing else) as that of a great Greek poet¹ and that the translator Hunayn, living in the ninth century A.D., claimed to be able to recite Homeric verses.² There is moreover a possibility that Muslim students learned about Homer at Edessa, where the monk Theophilus (died 785) had translated Homer into the Syriac language.³ On the other hand, the Byzantine Greeks were in the habit of re-telling the Iliad and the Odyssey in the form of prose tales which may have gone far and wide.

However, in spite of these factors in the situation, a close examination of the case of Polyphem fails to reveal decisive evidence that Homer was known to Arab and Persian scholars in classical times as much more than a name about which nothing could be said, even though O. Hackmann, who collected 221 versions of Polyphem, believed they had only produced copies of the Homeric version of a tale of Caucasian origin.⁴

¹ Fihrist, ed. Fluegel.

² E. W. Lane, *Arabian Night Entertainments*, New National Edition, New York, 1914, Vol. IV, 680.

³ Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vol. I, 521.

⁴ O. Hackmann, *Die Polyphem Sage in der Volksueberlieferung*, Helsingfors, 1904, 241 p.

The point is that many questions arise around the Arabic versions which were known to Hackmann. The most popular one is to be found in the third journey of Sindbad the Sailor and so raises the whole question of the origins of the Arabian Nights themselves. These tales, as we know them today, are arranged according to their content and it is on this basis that attempts were made to determine their time and place of origin. Sindbad's story is usually recognized as a collection of traveller's tales translated from the Persian, which took their definitive form in either Baghdad or Basra at the time of greatest splendor of these cities, namely during the third century of the Hegira, or the tenth century A.D. The name of Sindbad himself is Iranian. On the other hand, as the seventh and last journey was found to be of Cairo Jewish origin,⁵ the possibility of intrusion of non-Iranian elements in the other journeys must be kept in mind. Similar considerations apply to an Oghuz version from Turkestan and to a Turkish literary version included in the tale of Moradbak, which was published in France, as early as 1743.⁶ Both helped W. Grimm to raise the question of Polyphem in the East for the first time, one century ago.

Another version of Polyphem's myth appears elsewhere in the Arabian Nights, in the tale of Sayif al-Muluk, and here an interesting situation obtains, because this is the only tale in the series of which an Iranian version has survived unabridged and unaltered until today. Why so keen an interest on the part of translators who, in all other cases, took the greatest possible liberties with their subject? Apparently it is because this tale mentions the Baghdad caliphs, who are favorite heroes of the Arabs rather than of the Persians. At the same time, further evidence of the popularity of Polyphem among the Iranians is given in a tale published in Belgium, by A. Briceux.⁷ This Persian tale was translated from a manuscript kept at the university of Berlin and dated 22 Ragab 1245 (1830 A.D.) but reproducing without doubt a much older original.

⁵V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes et relatifs aux Arabes*, Liège, 1897, Vol. IV, 133.

⁶W. Grimm, "Die Sage von Polyphem," *Koen. Preuss. Akad. d. Wiss. Berlin: Abhandlungen Philol. Hist. Klasse*, 1857, 1-30.

W. Eberard & P. N. Boratav, *Typen tuerkischer Volksmaerchen*, Wiesbaden, 1953.

⁷A. Briceux, *Contes Persans*, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Liège, 1901.

At the other end of the eastern world, G. Germain collected three versions from unsophisticated Berber residents in Southern Morocco⁸ and later on was given a fourth one by one of his pupils, who was a member of the Zemmour tribe, in Central Morocco. He ultimately came to the conclusion that the scholars who had dealt with Polyphem's myth had erred by considering isolated details, especially the one-eyed monster, rather than the story as a whole, and that the tale actually was a very old Egyptian-Libyan initiation myth, anterior to Homer himself.⁹

Coming to the analysis of the story, L. Radermacher distinguished three themes in Polyphem's tale: (a) playing with the word "nobody," (b) running away under the sheep, (c) blinding the monster. His opinion was that Homer had combined two different stories, one of escape with the word "nobody," and another one of escape after blinding.¹⁰ This only applied to Homer himself. Considering all known versions, Gruppe recognized four themes, rather than three, viz., (a) "nobody," (b) blinding, (c) the sheep, (d) the magic ring.¹¹ It is important to note that the ring, while conspicuously absent from Homer and from all oriental versions, is a very common feature in German tales that include one or more of the other themes. A. Wiedemann accepted the Homeric origin of Sindbad as proven on the ground that all Homeric themes were found in either Sindbad or Sayif al-Muluk.¹²

A close examination of the oriental versions leads to disagreement with this suggestion. In the Arabian Nights, the giant lives in a house, not in a cave, and he selects the man he wants to eat as the most appetizing one, without bothering about keeping the leader for the end. After eating, he falls asleep naturally, without drinking wine. In contrast to Ulysses, Sindbad experiences no difficulty with his companions, who help him wholeheartedly. Two iron sticks, instead of one, are used to blind the giant, and here nobody will fail to suspect an alteration of

⁸G. Germain, "Ulysse, le Cyclope et les Berbères," *Revue de littérature Comparée*, 15:573-623, 1935.

⁹G. Germain, *Genèse de l'Odyssée—Le Fantastique et le Sacré*, Paris, 1954, 55-129.

¹⁰L. Radermacher, "Die Erzählungen der Odyssee," *Sitzungsberichte Kais. Koen. Akad. d. Wissenschaften Wien, P.H. Klasse*, 1916, 3-59.

¹¹O. Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte*, Munich, 1906, Vol. I, 705.

¹²A. Wiedemann, "Zur Polyphem-Sage," *Der Urquell* (1894), 85-86.

some original Homeric version. At the same time, the Orientals keep dropping important pieces of the Greek tale in a way which is by no means easy to explain. Calling oneself "nobody" certainly would sound strange in Arabic, but so it does in French, and French story-tellers, even in the most popular versions, never fail to include it in their tale. As to wine, though it is true that good Moslems do not drink it, there is plenty of drunkenness all through the Arabian Nights. The absence of sheep completes the picture of a giant utterly different from Polyphem, and as the differences consist in suppressions, rather than in additions, they are not apparently the result of natural evolution. Sindbad only adds two points to the Greek story,—his description of the monster is very minute, and his own speech is full of religious invocations.

In A. Briceux's Persian tale, Selim the Jeweler meets a giant much more like Polyphem than his Arab brothers. A shepherd, but not a nomad, the Iranian Cyclops speaks cynically to the traveller, saying "Your turn will come after the forty others"—forty being a very common number in Oriental folklore. As in the *Odyssey* again, the giant drinks himself to sleep and the hero's companions decline to help him. Selim is a shrewd and cautious man, utterly different in this respect from the Arab travellers. The only difference with Homer is that the Persian gets no help at all and still succeeds in killing the monster. Of all the Oriental tales, this one stands closest to the Greek epos, and the others may be described as half-way between this and the story of Sindbad. The Homeric themes of the blinding and of the sheep also appear in the Persian tales of Sayif al-Muluk and of Hadjadj and Selim, and in the Berber versions; but the blinding alone is found in the Turkish stories of Moradbak and of Depe Gocz, the latter being the Oghuz version.

The characters of the two heroes seem to supply the best way of ascertaining the relations between versions of Polyphem's myth. With regard to Ulysses, W. Grimm already noted that in the *Odyssey* itself there is a difference between Ulysses visiting Polyphem and the hero as he appears in the rest of the epos.¹³ The otherwise shrewd and cautious traveller suddenly becomes a braggard who drives his companions into a known

¹³ W. Grimm, *op. cit.*

danger and who, once freed, amuses himself in shouting twice at the still dangerous monster he has blinded. E. G. Wilkins explains this as a divine punishment of Ulysses for the murder he has committed,¹⁴ and E. Abrahamson holds that insatiable curiosity may be the answer not only to the question of why Ulysses wanted to see that dangerous land where the Cyclops was known to live, but also why he involved himself in another tangle on the occasion of his visit to Circe.¹⁵ Whatever the explanation, it is only on a rare occasion that Ulysses grows so foolish and, even then, he remains considerably wiser than Sindbad and the other Oriental visitors to the Cyclops.

In Sindbad's tale, the hero is a typical merchant, anxious to make money in travelling, rather than to satisfy any propensity of an intellectual order. He also wastes in a happy-go-lucky fashion the fortunes acquired in his journeys. The same applies to Salim the Jeweler in A. Bricteux's Persian tale. In the other Arabian Night story, Sayif al-Muluk is a prince subject to a divine curse, a man not devoid of courage and with a taste for romance, utterly different from Sindbad as well as from Ulysses, but highly reminiscent of Bissat, the hero of the Oghuz tale. In Morocco, the Berbers associate Polyphem's myth with a local historical celebrity, Sidi Hamed Ou Moussa, the patron saint of Southern Moroccan wandering minstrels.

Thus the heroes appear extremely different from each other, with hardly more than one point in common, they all attack their enemy in his sleep. This trait is characteristic because it does not fit within an epos. In Iranian literature, Rustem, the hero of the Shah Nameh, never for one moment considers the opportunity of killing someone while asleep, though often dealing with monsters as ugly as Polyphem. Our myth belongs in folklore rather than in epic literature and Euripides already may have been aware of this, as he granted Ulysses, when bringing the story to the stage, with an unquenchable thirst for vengeance which is not mentioned in the *Odyssey*.¹⁶

On the contrary, Polyphem stays largely unchanged, what-

¹⁴ E. G. Wilkins, "The Homeric Poems as Companion Pieces," *The Classical Journal*, 30:25-34, 1935.

¹⁵ E. Abrahamson, "The Adventures of Odysseus," *The Classical Journal*, 51:313-316, 1956.

¹⁶ Masqueray, "Le cyclope d'Euripide et celui d'Homère," *Revue des Etudes Anciennes*, 4:165-190, 1902.

ever the time and country. Euripides himself found nothing that needed correction in Homer's picture of the Cyclops. In the Arabian Nights, the monster is called *shaksun*, which is literally translated from the Greek and might well be rendered by "The Thing," but his description remains quite vague, while the Persian tale carefully mentions that Pour Djadou ("full of witchcraft") is a giant who tends sheep and who lives in a cave. At the same time, the Persian monster is said to be a *div*, that is a kind of supernatural being very common in Iranian literature since the days of the Avesta. Metaphorically, the people of the Caucasian area, who were the most stubborn adversaries of the Persian invaders, and among whom Polyphem's myth may have originated, are also known as *div*. The giant, in all Oriental versions, can be identified with Polyphem in his man-eating propensities and also on account of his cynical attitude toward his guests, and a natural process of evolution, which has been well observed in Indian literature, suffices to explain the extra attributes with which he is endowed in some versions. The only surprising point is that in Sindbad's tale, the giant keeps silent, so that we cannot ascertain the maintenance here of the usual cynical attitude.

As it is, the most striking difference between Polyphem and the Oriental giants remains that the Greek Cyclops alone is one-eyed. One certainly feels like taking this as an important point but the fact remains that Homer himself, while always speaking of one eye, nevertheless mentions eyebrows in the plural, *ophruas*.¹⁷ If the Greek author could so easily contradict himself in this respect, little can be made of the absence of one-eyed giants in Oriental versions. This difference may be a matter of religion. In Ancient Greece, sculptors often mutilated their statues deliberately because they feared to compete with the gods in their creative work¹⁸ and in Islam, there simply was no question of reproducing human beings in art, so that no pictures would help in preserving the original features of the one-eyed Cyclops. On the other hand, as there were no definite objections to the idea, just a lack of popular interest, the apparently Greek

¹⁷ *Odyssey*, IX, 389.

¹⁸ W. Deonna, "Les yeux absents et clos des statues de la Grèce primitive," *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, 48:219-244, 1935.

concept of the one-eyed giant does not remain entirely absent from the eastern mind. It appears in an Arabic edition of the Arabian Nights published at Bulaq, Cairo, which may be dismissed as literature, and also in all versions of the tale of Abu'l Fawaris, in the Arabian Nights, where it may have been better preserved because this tale remained less popular, and so less often told than that of Sindbad. G. Germain resorted to ethnography in his analysis of the Moroccan tale. Homer, said this French scholar, gave us a perfect description of a rather unusual type of culture which today survives in North Africa.¹⁹ His giants do not till the land, they are a pastoral but none the less a settled tribe. The appearance of sheep in the Odyssey moreover may be a reminiscence of the goat cult which, in North Africa, was only abolished by Islam with the greatest difficulty.²⁰

But ethnography only serves to show how close the correspondence remains between any version of Polyphem's tale and the culture in which it is re-told. The Iranian giant could very well be a mountaineer of Mazenderan, and the Egyptian Cyclops some well-to-do resident of a Cairo which only began to change about a century ago. In religion, Ulysses acts as a true Greek and hears Polyphem curse the gods and recognize the hand of fate in the best fashion of Athenian tragedy²¹ while all the Moslem travellers keep praying with their whole heart and hear nothing of these pagan curses. For a giant somewhat reminiscent of Polyphem, we have to go as far as India, where the Viradha giant of the Ramayana dies from the hand of Rana, discoursing in the same way as the Greek cyclops.²² Even today, according to G. Germain, the Toda of Deccan have shepherds whom they recognize as of a sacred character and who, for this reason, are not subject to the rules of prayer and sacrifice-making that apply to the common people.

Our conclusion is that something of Homer must have filtered down to the Orient through the Persians, maybe one of those who attended school at Edessa, as these would have been likely to hear of Theophilus' translation of Homer into Syriac. How-

¹⁹ G. Germain, *op. cit.*

²⁰ G. Germain, "Le culte du bélier en Afrique du Nord," *Hespéris: Archives Berbères et Bull. Inst. Htes Etudes Maroc.*, 35:93-124, 1948.

²¹ Odyssey, IX, 506.

²² A. Roussel, *Le Ramayana de Vālmiki*, Paris, 1903, Vol. II, sarga 2.

ever, they were no more interested in it than educated Orientals today are in the Arabian Nights, so that the features that stayed in their mind were only those reminiscent of their own div tales. This would account for both the difference in character-pictures and the faithful retention of the story itself. In the absence of the proper background, the tale was bound to be more deeply altered in passing from the Persians to the Arabs and Turks. In North Africa, where the tale is likely to have come last, the sheep episode may have been restored as reminiscent of the goat-cult, maybe through borrowing from the Sayif al-Muluk tale. Ultimately, this would disprove the suggestion that Homer was actually translated into Arabic, and show how diffusion may consist in the acceptance of a story without its proper heroes.

NOTES AND NEWS

At the annual meeting of the Catholic Anthropological Conference, May, 1957, the Editor was instructed to include, whenever practicable, information on authors, news of members and especially of their current research. The Editor will be happy to receive such data and requests that members keep her informed.

Dr. Allen Spitzer is Director of Anthropological Research, Saint Louis University and also holds appointments as Research Professor of Anthropology at both Mexico City College (1955) and Universidad Nacional del Sureste, Mérida, Yucatán (1957). His particular research interest is in the field of folk Catholicism which he has pursued in Tepoztlán, Morelos, Mexico (1955 and 1956) and in Mérida, Yucatán (1957). He plans to follow up previous work among the Blackfeet of Montana during the coming summer. Dr. Spitzer has been appointed Advisory Editor for Social Anthropology on the staff of Sociological Abstracts, 1958.

Current courses offered in Social Anthropology at St. Louis University include for the Upper Division: Social Anthropology, Cultures of America (Indians of the Plains; Civilization of the Maya), The Teaching of Sociology (including Anthropology); for the Graduate School: Anthropological and Sociological Aspects of Human Relations, Seminar in Area Studies (Rural Mexico; The Pacific Islands), Studies in Culture (The People of Yucatan, Chinese Civilization), The Anthropological Classics, Seminar in Social Anthropology (The Little Community, The Works of Robert Redfield), and Research Methodology: Methods in Field Research.

Social Anthropology may be selected as an area of study for the M.A. and/or the Ph.D. Qualified graduate students may be considered for supervised field work on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; in the Tepoztlán area of Morelos, Mexico, and the Yucatán Peninsula with headquarters in Mérida, through the cooperation of the Blackfeet Tribal Council, Mexico City College, and the University of Yucatán.

Dr. Jean Comhaire, Professor of Sociology at Seton Hall

College, South Orange, New Jersey, and his wife, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, have recently completed a little more than a year's field work at Kenscoff, Haiti. The research involved a study of culture change under the Columbia University Program for the Study of Man in the Tropics. They had already done work there in 1937-39, so that they were well-acquainted with the community. Although change had been expected to result from the opening of the road and the growth of the place as a summer resort, the Haitian family structure was found to be so strong that little change had taken place.

Though both members of the team are still busy organizing their material, the United Nations Mission in Haiti, and the local clergy, have already started community development projects on the basis of the Kenscoff survey. Close cooperation with the parish clergy, consisting of two Dutch priests of the Holy Ghost Order, proved mutually beneficial. The parish records, which go back to 1860, enabled the two anthropologists to compare the data on about 3,000 marriages with the information they had collected on the subject from the local peasants. At the same time, in reconstructing the genealogical tree of all the inhabitants of the parish center—a village of about 1,000 residents—they supplied valuable information for the parish archives. According to competent visitors, no parish in the West Indies keeps files as complete as those now in the hands of the Kenscoff clergy.

Dr. Gottfried O. Lang, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Catholic University, during the summer of 1957 was engaged in field work in Colorado. He was part of a team of anthropologists under the direction of Dr. Gordon McGregor, Field Director and anthropologist. The study is being carried out by the U. S. Public Health Service, Behavioral Studies Section. The objective is to discover the medical needs of a community which now has few public health services in operation.

The general framework in which the anthropological team worked was that of the "community study" approach. It was felt that all medical relationships, whether scientific or folk, occur in a cultural context. In this instance, this context may be characterized as a mixed cattle-grain growing economy, which presents a distinct subcultural pattern in the so-called "dust-

bowl." Dr. Lang was primarily interested in the relationship of environment and technology and how these relate to the cultural value orientations.

Studies like these have not only practical significance, but shed light on the factors operative in externally and internally induced culture change.

Currently Dr. Lang is also consulting with Howard University's Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine on a comparative study of Negro and white health needs, as well as attitudes in relation to existing health services. The basic assumption in this study is that people will, in large measure, avail themselves of health services in terms of their own culturally perceived definitions of illness, as well as their definitions of what constitutes a health practitioner. The techniques for this study are partly anthropological and partly sociological, required by urban circumstances.

Students from Catholic University are cooperating with Howard University students in certain phases of this study.

Dr. Lang was appointed by Dr. E. A. Hoebel, President of the AAA, as Chairman of the Committee on Local Arrangements for the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association to be held in Washington, D. C. at the Shoreham Hotel, November 20-23, 1958.